The use of alcoholic beverages,
gambling, and the eating of pork (as well as certain other 262
"unclean" animals) are specifically prohibited in the Quran. [525]
The chieftains and commoners, more as a matter of taste [273]
than of piety, infrequently break the first two of these [183]
demands. The government elite, as has been noticed, finds
its chief diversion in them. No one in the three groups,
including the several Christians among the officials, ever
eats pork. There was a peculiar tale current in the town [773
of a Kurdish tribe "somewhere in the mountains" who eat
the flesh of swine, but it is probably fabulous, like the
bears who carry off women as mates or the numerous accounts
of buried treasure. The Nestorians, however, hunt the wild
boar and eat it. Blasphemy, as a matter of cursing, is 771
an everyday affair, but in all the groups of the town it
was impossible to find anyone who challenged religion.
Some of the better educated officials and teachers, to be
sure, exhibited views which might be termed "liberal," but
none was a serious unbeliever. There is perhaps a reason
for this, the almost religious regard for all written or [212]
printed material, so common in the Middle East. A teacher,
confronted by the Quran on one hand and an atheist pamphlet
on the other, is convinced that in some way both are true,
because both are printed, and can either be reconciled or
exist, equally valid, side by side.

The Muslim religious calendar is lunar, dated from 805
the flight of the Prophet from Mecca in 622 A.D., and con-
sists of twelve months. Because it is based on the rotation
of the moon about the earth, rather than that of the earth

about the sun, it falls short several weeks each year in relation to solar reckoning. 1953, for example, is 1372 years after the flight in Muslim calculation and only 1331 in our own. The terminology of this calendar is Arabic, although the Kurds have their own words for the days of the week and the seasons. The government uses both the Muslim and the Gregorian systems, and Friday is the weekly holiday. Turning to the Muslim festivals observed by the townspeople, the first occurs on the tenth day of the first lunar month (Muharram), the legendary date of many important events, particularly the martyrdom of Husayn, the grandson of the Prophet. In Shiite areas this day and those immediately preceding it furnish the occasion for the most extravagant ceremonies, including a dramatic recitation of the martyrdom and public displays of mourning in which the participants often beat and lacerate themselves. In Rowanduz, however, it is only a day for special prayer and meditation. "The people pray for Hasan and Husayn," it was said, "but there are no demonstrations of grief." The next important date is the Mawlid al-Nabi, "the birthday of the Prophet," which comes on the twelfth day of the third month (Rabi' al-Awal). This is a day of celebration on which banquets are held and the servants are given small presents, but the display is not great compared with the two festivals to follow.

The ninth lunar month, Ramadan, is that in which absolute fasting is required between sunrise and sunset of every Muslim. It begins on the eve in which the moon

twelfth lunar month (Dhu al-Hijja). This corresponds to 796
the day at Mecca when the pilgrims assembled there are ritually
sacrificing an animal at Mina outside the city. Every family
in Rowanduz who can afford the expense purchases a sheep [782]
or goat for a sacrifice in communion with the pilgrims on
the first day of Jayjani Qurban, and the head of the victim
is turned toward Mecca as its throat is cut. This feast
lasts three or four days, and is identical in character
with that ending Ramadan, although perhaps lacking some of
the intense exuberance caused by the end of the fast. Dur-
ing both of these festivals, persons greet each other
cheerily, and the atmosphere is similar to that of our own
Christmastide.

Apart from the lunar Muslim calendar, two observances 527
must be mentioned which are reckoned by the solar year.
The first of these is Sayran or Sayrani Bahar (also
identified in Rowanduz as Kara Charchima, "Black Wednesday," [805]
in border Turkish and as Hawrus in Persian). This corres-
ponds to the season of the Vernal Equinox, usually
occurring in the last weeks of March, and in antique usage
the beginning of the New Year. The connection of the
celebrations with paganism is obvious and need not be
explored here. "In the spring every Wednesday for several
weeks is supposed to be a holy day," it was said, although
there was no verbal reference to any religion, Muslim or
otherwise. On these Wednesdays, the townspeople, both men
and women, go out into the countryside in family parties,
taking food and drink with them. The day is passed out of